

THE CORRESPONDENT.

MAGNA EST VERITAS ET PREVALEBIT.

BY GEORGE HOUSTON, EDITOR AND PROPRIETOR.

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CORRESPONDENCE.

FREE DISCUSSION.

Mr. Editor—It cannot have escaped your notice, that a strong predilection exists on the part of the advocates of religion to suppress all discussion respecting it, and to induce the civil power to aid them in retaining the multitude in mental bondage. In thus endeavoring to paralyze the efforts of those, who sincerely believe they are engaged in dispelling ignorance, and prostrating superstition, the religionists seem to have forgot that Christianity itself was an open, undisguised attack on the religion of every country where it forced its way—on the religion established by law. All the persecutions and prosecutions of Christians under the Jewish and under the Roman laws were for this cause; the martyrs openly opposed the sentiments of the community and the laws of the land. Why did they so? Because they were so well satisfied of the great superiority of Christianity over the religion of that country, that they deemed it their duty to propagate at all hazards, tenets so much more worthy of being embraced; and to counteract the erroneous opinions so universally prevailing. Hence they have established by their uniform practice, the right of Christians to oppose, with the utmost zeal, every form of superstition in every country where it prevails, without regard to the sanction afforded to it by the laws of the land. Their justification is, their conviction of the superior truth and benefit of Christianity.

Christianity having been from its origin to the present day, actually propagated on these principles, how can Christians refuse to others the same privileges urged upon the same pretences, with equally honest intentions, and with expectations of rendering the same kind of benefit; that is, to put an end to erroneous and mischievous opinions? If the modern reformers of Christianity (infidels as they are *politely* called) are equally honest and sincere with the Christian reformers of Paganism, and use precisely the same arguments for precisely the same purposes; what right has a Christian to object to it? The Christians, indeed, at the onset of their career, sometimes went farther than mere argument; and opposed and obstructed the Pagans, who were in the peaceable exercise of their religion, by force and violence. I apprehend that in doing so they did wrong, and deserved punishment. I wish my present

argument to be confined exclusively to opposition by a fair and open discussion.

In fact, do not the priesthood proceed now as the early Christians did? Do not our bible societies, and our tract societies, and our missionary societies disperse Christian publications, and preach Christian doctrines to all nations, Jew, Turk, and Gentile? to the Mahomedans, Hindoos, Burmanese, Otaheitans? Are not our Christian protestants sedulously at work in Roman Catholic countries, and the Roman Catholics equally industrious in England? How edifying is the truly Christian warfare in Ireland, where a few protestants, with an army at their back, are endeavoring with might and main to convert from the religious error of their ways, ten times the number of Catholics, by fine and imprisonment, by hanging and burning, and the *holy* uses of the musket and bayonet, the dungeon and the gallows.

In a Christian country, therefore, as in England, to punish by fine and imprisonment, honest, zealous and well meaning men, who do no actual injury, except by using fair argument, and inviting to open discussion—men who take no other liberties with Christianity than Christ and his apostles, and all the primitive Christians took with their honest and well meaning heathens of their day—whose motives are unimpeachable and praiseworthy, even if their opinions be erroneous—and who suffer with all the fearlessness and unconcern of the early martyrs of the church—if Christians and Christianity can justify such persecution, then is it high time that all honest and well meaning men should retire from the ranks of Christianity, and refuse their countenance to a religion which, unable to support itself by argument, makes no scruple to employ the hired bigots of the bench to suppress all discussion, by fining and imprisoning those who have failed of being convinced by a proud and rapacious clergy.

The prevailing religion of any country either *is* erroneous, in whole or in part; or it *is not*. If it be erroneous, a full and free discussion of its errors, real or supposed, is the only way to mend it. If it be perfect, and incapable of being proved erroneous, what possible injury can arise from discussion? Discussion, and that alone, is sure to dispel the doubts and fears of the weak-minded, and confirm the faith of the ignorant, and the wavering. *Magna est Veritas, et prevalebit*. To dread discussion and investigation, belongs to error—not truth.

Suppose an unbeliever (being prohibited from advancing the arguments that press upon his mind) should from precedent considerations profess the orthodox faith. Pains and penalties, present or in prospect, may produce this effect; they may coerce his conduct, but they cannot convince his intellect. What do you gain on converting, by the force of argumentative fine and imprisonment, an honest man into a hypocrite? I appeal to every man of reading and reflection; every man of good education, whether the majority of his acquaintance of this description, are not unbelievers in fact, though conformists in conduct? There may be a majority of true believers among ignorant fanatics, but I doubt if this be the case among those who rank as men of sense and men of the world. What good does modern Christianity produce, to counterbalance this far spread simulation and dissimulation—this degrading, but prudent and almost necessary hypocrisy? Would it not be better

for Christianity to take the chance of unreserved, unlimited discussion, by which unbelievers of honest intention, sound intellect, and good education, may be converted, rather than have a Christian priesthood entrenching themselves behind the law, and treating every doubt as a denial? As our Calvinistic presbyterians generally do.

In this country we have a great deal of *theoretical* toleration, and much *practical* bigotry. If what are called infidels are not prosecuted for avowing their opinions, do not the pious priesthood, with one accord, offer their supplications and prayers that vengeance may fall on the blasphemer who doubts or denies the truth of their dogmas, or the validity of their heavenly credentials? Where they cannot prosecute, do they not combine to hunt such a man out of society; to insinuate calumnies that they cannot prove; to disparage his moral character; to paralyze his honest influence; to prevent his success in the world? Are they not the calumniators of all men whom they suspect of infidelity; unless he makes his peace by subscribing like his neighbors to some of their conventicles? Is he not put under the ban of all bible societies, tract societies, missionary societies, and the clerical societies of sturdy beggars, stationary and itinerant, of every description? Are not his prospects in life blasted, his family made his enemies, and his friends terrified at being so deemed?

Christians do not seem to be aware, that in calling on the civil power to aid them in *protecting* religion, they afford an incontrovertible proof that they themselves have doubts as to its divine origin. When we look into the new testament, which they regard as the word of God, we find it stated, that when Jesus sent his disciples forth to preach his doctrines, he told them they should experience all sorts of rebuffs; but he did not say one word as to punishment in *this* world of those who rejected him and his disciples—or of those who avowed their disbelief. He said that his church was founded on a rock, and that all the powers of hell could not prevail against it. If Christians believe this to be the fact (and they must believe it or give up the name) why trouble themselves in what manner the rock is assailed by the writings or speeches of philosophers? When they concern themselves so much about those who oppose Christianity, do they not raise a doubt as to Christianity itself? Do they not call in question the assertion of the founder of their religion, when he assured his followers, that nothing should shake the foundations of the faith he had established.

If Jesus had said in any part of the gospels—"He that calleth in question any part of my mission, the same you shall proceed against—the same you shall fine and imprison"—then they should have had some rule to go by, and their prosecutions might have had some countenance—but when, in perusing the gospels, we find nothing to warrant this, and are told by the priests that their religion is a religion of forgiveness—of the overlooking of injuries—and the returning of good for evil—the very reverse of prosecution—we cannot help thinking that all proceedings at any time against those who even call in question Christianity, are of an anti-Christian nature.

Jesus is said, in one part of the new testament, to have declared that his kingdom is *not* of this world. How then can this religion be part

of any of the laws of any kingdom or republic of the earth? It might as well be said that Christianity is part of our being, because the gospels contain the precepts by which our lives shall be governed. That these precepts are laws to *Christians*, no one will deny, but not as the laws of the land. They are the laws of Jesus, laid down to guide those who are willing to be his disciples—but were never intended to be used as secular means, to compel or punish. The man who does not acknowledge them, is not a Christian. If by not conforming to them, he violates some established law of the land, let him be judged by that law which he has infringed—and not for his simple belief, or for any objections he may start against the divinity of the Christian institutions.

PHILO VERITAS.

DOCTOR TO THE PRIEST.

Sir—Were the correspondence that has now passed between us submitted to the judgment of a few unprejudiced minds, I have little doubt, notwithstanding your confidence, but their decision would be, that, upon rational grounds, christianity cannot be maintained. I have told you repeatedly, that, without coming to the principles of nature, our discussions would be endless, and you have all along studiously avoided this particular scene of action. When you talk of events happening contrary to the general laws of the universe, and say that there is nothing *impossible* with God, you are driven to the *dernier* resort, that all theologians have recourse to when surrounded with perplexities. Converse with a Hindoo, a Turk, or a Christian, they have, on this question, all the same answer. When I condescended to enter on the disputed points in the history of christianity, I did it merely with the view to shew you that though averse to enter such a bewildered and boundless tract of jarring opinion, I was still willing to continue the correspondence while I thought I could unveil to you the inconsistencies that exist in the detail of the Christian religion itself. Your answers will plainly prove to what extent this has been done; and, though I am not in a manner bound to reply to you, after your thus avoiding the only plan by which any rational explanation can take place, I will, however, as your epistle is very luminous, and abounds with a great deal of determined confidence, give you in reply a few observations.

Notwithstanding all that has been said, you are yet inclined to believe in the marvellous, and cling strenuously to the absurdity of the sun standing still. I must, indeed, say that he who contends for the belief of this *miracle*, is truly ignorant of the “mighty mechanism of nature.” The sun being the centre of the system, shews, at once, the foolishness of the assertion. Even granting your way of it, if any phenomena had taken place similar to that you suppose, it must have been the earth that ceased in its diurnal motion—an event which would have produced a derangement in our globe that would have overwhelmed the waters upon the land, and convulsed in ruin every city and habitable spot in the world. You certainly have strange ideas of the supreme being when you justify the horrid barbarities of the Israelites, a people that were considered by all the enlightened nations around them, a savage race, and who had no more right to invade the land of Canaan than the Spaniards had to over-

run the beautiful provinces of Mexico and Peru. It was under the mask of religion that Pizarro committed his bloody massacres ; so was it under the same influence that Moses carried his murderous intentions against the ill-fated Canaanites.

If you choose to assert that it pleased the deity to make these Jewish barbarians the executioners of his vengeance against the neighboring nations, it appears very strange that that deity would have made his son descend from such a set of miscreants, who, by your own account, must be considered in no other light than common hangmen.

Your contrast of Jesus with the balloon, really is too much. If you would study science more and superstition less, you would save yourself from appearing ridiculous. The principles of natural philosophy would have led you to treat the subject very differently. I know of no power in nature that could make Jesus ascend beyond the boundaries of a certain distance. But pray, where is that heaven which you so confidently talk of. For my part, I cannot conceive in what region it exists ; it is assuredly not in the moon, and, if we place it in the highest fixed star, Jesus must, indeed, have a very long and fatiguing journey to undergo. Astronomy teaches us that a cannon ball, flying at the rate of 1000 miles an hour, would not reach the star Sirius in 7000 years ; he is therefore, not half way on his journey. Moreover, what a pretty figure a man would make, setting out upon his travels with his body covered with wounds, the situation in which our *acronaut* must have been previous to his flight ; and to which he particularly alludes when he tells his friend Thomas to thrust his hand into his side to convince him that he alone was the crucified Jesus.

The story about the rams' horns really excited my risible faculties ; but the trumpets are still more laughable. What a fine idea it would be to suppose that a modern general would advance before the walls of such a town as Badajos, and make the garrison surrender by demolishing the batteries with the procession of a few priests, marching thrice round them, and sounding rams' horns or trumpets.

You speak about wrong translation ; you admit then, that it is wrong. This is sufficient to invalidate the whole story, for it shows that it is liable to error and can never be divine, coming through the hands of ignorant or perhaps interested translators. About the conception which receives the name of immaculate, it requires only common sense to see its absurdity. I will appeal to any one, if, throughout the whole of my observations, any warmth exists, which can come under the temperament which you call enthusiastic ; but, I confess, when I see such a subject gravely mentioned, I can scarcely forbear deploring that state of mind which listens to such contemptible foolery.

When upon this subject, as well as others, I certainly must say, that you display, in a great degree, your extreme ignorance of the laws of nature. One can scarcely be serious on such a topic. The plan which you would approve of, sanctions something like adultery. Why did the holy ghost fix upon a woman who was to be engaged in the "holy bands of matrimony." There surely were in the neighborhood plenty of other virgins. In any shape that you choose to have it, you must set this tale down as truly disgusting ; and when you consider that for a long

period it engaged the attention of the *pious* fathers of christianity, we cannot do otherwise than think, that human intellect, in these ages, was truly in a deplorable and degraded state. It was long a disputed point, whether, in this *mysterious* copulation, semen was emitted by Mary, a question that gave rise to many of those violent agitations that prevailed in the councils of the church, and which formed the doctrine concerning the hypostatical union of persons in Jesus. Such offensive folly originated from men who received the epithet of *learned*, and who are, in the history of christianity, still dignified with the splendid titles of saints and bishops; but these holy men begin to appear, now-a-days, in their real character. We can look with contempt upon such stuff, though we, doubtless, must lament that many young men are yet doomed, during their scholastic education, to wander through these mazes of polemical divinity, losing their precious time and perverting their judgments, while they might be devoted to the inquiry of something more rational.

To return, however, to matters that from a more important appearance, as far as what you consider the props of Christianity, I have to observe, that in my last I demanded of you to give a clear proof of the ascension of Jesus. In this, I must say there is every evidence that you have completely failed; but I feel no surprise in such a failure; I know you could offer no proof; yet, as you had confidently talked upon the truth of these things, I gave you an opportunity, lest you might have possessed some knowledge of them that other men have not. Now, the amount of your knowledge is, that you do not bring forward one witness to attest the alleged fact. In place of this, you refer me to Mathew's notions on this subject. What have I or any one else to do with *his* belief. He never asserts that he saw Jesus ascend, and therefore, his believing it cannot establish satisfactorily the disputed point. You next advert to John, as a proof that Jesus did ascend, and you say, that this disciple records discourses which allude to our lord's removal from the earth. This, however, is not even the shadow of proof. Nothing is more absurd than this. You really seem to be very ignorant of what should prove a fact, when you refer me to the allusions and belief of men that did not witness it themselves. You next quote John xx. 17, as a proof of the ascension, where Jesus says to Mary that he is not ascended, "but go to my brethren," &c. &c. This, however, is really weak, and displays a superficial acquaintance with such subjects, at which I feel somewhat astonished. It is, indeed, worse than the allusions just mentioned. Here is Jesus declaring himself that he is to ascend, to a woman whose conduct is very suspicious, and who latterly informs John about the business. This man, therefore, must be considered the third person. If you receive this as proof, you may believe in any thing however absurd or ridiculous.

You bring in Paul's evidence as you do that of Matthew and John, and next claim assistance from Peter; but, unhappily, you go to the wrong book for his proof. When you give a reference to the Acts of the Apostles, do you imagine that Peter wrote these Acts? If you do, I must say as the bishop of Landaff said to Thomas Paine, "that you are a very unfit hand to comment upon the scriptures." But, to be more to the point, where is it that Peter says in his epistles that he saw Jesus ascend?

And, as for Stephen, he has no declaration whatever. The circumstance of my quoting Mark does not affect the event in question. If I am mistaken, I have only substituted one name for another. Matthew says, that Jesus commanded them to meet him in Galilee; and Luke, in the Acts, says, that he commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, and continues in his gospel to assert, that Jesus led them out as far as Bethany, which, by the by, is only two miles from the city. Now, here is a story truly irreconcilable; for the place that Matthew alludes to, where he was commanded to meet Jesus, is no less than eighty miles distant from Jerusalem. This is inconsistency indeed, and I leave you to put together in a better form this disjointed inspiration. If you mend it, I will find more work for you, for the whole is one mass of glaring absurdity and contradiction.

With regard to the resurrection, you still are deficient in what should constitute the principal proof; viz. men who saw Jesus in the sepulchre, and who also saw him rise. The guards give no account of the story; what is said about them is merely related by Matthew, and would never be received for evidence in any court of justice. Luke and Mark differ in their account of the inside scene of the sepulchre. The one says that the women saw two young men in shining garments, while the other affirms that they only beheld one young man clothed in white. Peter and John declare they saw only the linen clothes lying in two parcels. Excepting this trifling difference, on which it is not my intention to dwell, these three evangelists agree exactly in proving that no person was present when Jesus rose from the sepulchre.

Your remarks about the three days and three nights are sufficiently trifling. The type of Jonah, being three days and three nights in the whale's belly, is well understood to apply to the passage that the son of man shall be in the grave the same period of time. There can be no evasion regarding this, and I really wonder at you calling it a manner of speech only well known to those to whom it was delivered. If the meaning of it does not imply three times twenty-four hours, then I maintain that language has no meaning. In short, the whole of your revelation hangs on these two hypothesis—the resurrection and the ascension; and to prove that either took place, you have to do what you vainly thought you had done.

I can assure you I am not so easily satisfied with stories that are evidently manufactured to serve a particular purpose, and which have all the character of being second handed. I would prefer the testimony of eye-witnesses where matters of fact are in question; but, after all, if you feel contented, I can only conclude in the language of a certain pope, when performing a *holy* ceremony wherein he knew he was deceiving the people, "*He who wishes to be deceived, let him be deceived.*"* I should have given you the expression in the original, but this I suppose is of no moment.

* The story here alluded to is, perhaps, not generally known. It is related of a certain pope, that one day, while dispensing an ordinance where holy water was used, the multitude was so great that the vessel became dry. Without ceremony his holiness retired, and nearly filling it with his own urine, ultimately applied this saline production to the heads of the poor ignorant dupes, exclaiming to his cardinals that surrounded him, "*He who wishes to be deceived, let him be deceived.*"

DEITY.

Mr. Editor—I have observed in the course of your publication several interrogations by way of question, what is God? What is Providence? &c. These questions it seems have puzzled the learned of all ages; but this is no reason that we should cease our enquiries. As no one to my knowledge has given a satisfactory reply to these interrogations, I would, if you please, through the medium of your paper, submit a few remarks. Of all the objects of ancient worship or adoration, as a God, the sun seems to be the most rational. But on examination, the sun is not omnipresent; and, moreover, from our astronomical observations, the probability is, there are other suns encircled by other worlds; therefore the sun cannot be God or Providence in the general acceptance of the word.

Now we may with as much propriety ask what Nature is, as what God is, or what form doth she assume, or where is the seat of her empire? Neither of these positions I presume can be designated. I think it will be readily admitted, that Nature is omnipresent—confined to no form nor place, but blended with all forms, and in all places, at the same time. Although like unto God or Providence, yet neither God, nor Providence, nor the Creator; but an agent in the hands of Providence. As Nature is of the feminine gender, or at any rate considered so, the great mother of the vegetable and animal world; therefore, it cannot be God the Creator, because the feminine, according to our known theory, can effect nothing towards creation independent of the masculine. Hence, it may be perceived that there must be according to reason, another power like unto Nature, but superior—but not only omnipresent, but omniscient, omnipotent—confined to neither form nor place: and what is this but God or Providence?

Cato, in his reply to, or confutation of some of the positions of Dugald Stuart, in the *Correspondent*, No. 5, page 67, says it is man's ignorance in first causes that leads him to ascribe them to deity; for whenever man became acquainted with the causes of events, he has always found them to be independent of a ruling deity. Now I may say with as much propriety, that a steamboat performs all her trips or voyages, up and down rivers independent of its constructor. The fact is, the steamboat, or any other machine, is dependent on its constructor or builder, in the first place, for the means or capability of operating in cause and effect. Is it not then reasonable to suppose that all the causes and effects that take place, in the natural and moral world, are dependent on a first cause for their operating arrangement?

We may often see in human machinery a necessity to revise or improve, which requires a supernatural or superordinary interposition. But in the grand machinery of the universe, we can in reality see no such thing. Whatever we may imagine we see of the kind, is in consequence of our ignorance of the causes, as the grand machine of the universe and of nature revolves invariably and unchangeably; and all the design and purposes are effected in its natural or ordinary course, the hopes, or fears, or prayers of man to the contrary notwithstanding.

OBSERVER.

SATURDAY, MARCH 28, 1829.**LECTURES DELIVERED BEFORE THE FREE PRESS ASSOCIATION.**

On the Inconsistencies, Absurdities, and Contradictions of the Bible.

By the Secretary.—LECTURE XVII.

I have already alluded to the fact of Moses having married the daughter of Jethro, a priest of Midian. It appears from the 18th chapter of Exodus, that this same priest, hearing of the adventures of his son-in-law, paid him a visit for the purpose of assisting him, by his councils in organizing the judiciary department in the wilderness. Besides this proof of good feeling, of being anxious for the welfare of his kinsman, we afterwards find the countrymen of Jethro treating the children of Israel with great hospitality—inviting them to their feasts and sacrifices—and bestowing on them their young women in marriage. This friendship and hospitality was evidently excited by a knowledge that Moses, the chief of the Israelites, was allied to their nature, and considered as their countryman in the same way that Ruth was admitted to the privileges of a Jewess, though she was a daughter of Moab. Although the conduct of the Israelites in accepting the invitations of the Midianites or Moabites (for they appear to have been the same people) and in joining in their sacrifices, indicated that they were credulous, and easily led away by kind attentions; yet this instance of unsuspecting compliance, was converted by their God into a most atrocious and unpardonable offence. Jealous at seeing Baal-peor, the God of the Midianites, preferred before himself, his anger was kindled against Israel; and he said unto Moses, take all the heads or chiefs of the people and *hang them up before me, the lord, against the sun, that my fierce anger may be turned away from Israel*. Moses accordingly ordered the judges to slay every man that was joined to, or had worshipped Baal-peor.

Ought we not from his short history to form a better opinion of Baal-peor, as a kind, hospitable, and friendly deity, than of the vindictive, jealous and unmerciful God of the Hebrews? A God who seems to have delighted in leading his worshippers into strong temptations, that he might have a pretence for punishing them for transgressing his absurd laws.

Moses had married a Midianitish woman; but it is no where said that his God ever found fault with him for so doing. When, however, Zimri, a chief of the tribe of Simon, chose for a wife, Corbi, the daughter of a prince of Midian, the wrath of Jehovah was kindled on that account; for, as the text informs us, when Phineas, the grandson of Aaron, the priest, saw Zimri leading Corbi into his tent, he followed them with a javelin in his hand, and put them both to death. So highly pleased was the Hebrew deity with this act of perfidy and murder, that he is said, in consequence to have put a stop to the plague which then ravaged the camp of the Israelites!

But it was not a deity whose jealousy led him to such monstrous extremes. It was Moses that was influenced by that unworthy passion. If he had suffered the people to intermarry with the Midianites, they would insensibly have amalgamated with the mass of that nation, and his power would have been reduced to a shadow—the more especially if he

had suffered a prince of Israel and a princess of Midian to have formed an alliance. It was political craft, therefore, in Moses to ascribe anger, and jealousy, passions which rankled in his own bosom, to this imaginary God.

This view of the subject is farther elucidated by the after conduct of Moses towards the Midianites; for we read in Numbers, chap. 31st. that he armed a thousand men of every tribe, and sent them to war against that people, under the conduct of this same murdering priest, Phinehas, the son of Eleazar. It is said that God on this occasion told Moses to "avenge the children of Israel of the Midianites." Now the children of Israel had no cause to seek revenge of the Midianites—they had done them no injury, but on the contrary, had treated them with hospitality. But as Moses had political views to serve, for that reason, and no other, were the duped and ignorant multitude led into a war against their best friends—a war that is marked with every atrocity that can possibly be conceived; and all under the direction of the lord—for it is expressly said, that "they warred against the Midianites, *as the lord commanded Moses*, and slew all the males." Even "Eri, Reckem, Zur, Hur, and Reba, five kings of Midian; and Balaam also the son of Beor, they slew with the sword." Balaam their good friend—the incorruptible Balaam, who could not be bribed ever to do the smallest injury; he who said "blessed is he that blesseth thee, and cursed is he that curseth thee," they slew with the sword! What barbarians! What foul ingratitude! Balaam falls by the sword of the Hebrews for blessing them, and obeying their God against his own interest!

But what follows has no parallel in the history of any nation; nor has its cruelty been equalled by the most sanguinary tyrant. After the battle—in cold blood—every male among the little ones, and every woman that had known man, were ordered to be slain! And what reason is assigned for this atrocious deed? Some women, forsooth, had "caused the children of Israel to commit trespass against the lord;" and, therefore all this wanton cruelty is to be exercised, and the innocent and guilty made to perish indiscriminately together!

But, wicked, cruel, and atrocious as this act certainly was, we have not yet reached the climax. That debauchee lawgiver Moses kept the supposed unadulterated young women for himself and his free booting banditti. When the powerful pen of the immortal Paine gave its true coloring to this horrid transaction, the bishop of Landaff affected to see nothing in it, but "good policy combined with mercy." He conjectured that slavery, and not debauchery was the fate of the innocent young women of Midian. But supposing this to have been the case, who does not perceive that, instead of making the matter better, it made it worse; for, in the first place, it makes Jehovah, whom the bishop calls infinitely good, infinitely just, and infinitely merciful, the author of slavery; and secondly, by placing these young innocent females in that situation, they were more liable to be debauched than if they had been left at liberty. But conjecture, in this case, is needless; for a man who could contrive the indecent story of Adam and Eve, not to mention others in this *holy* book that cannot be read without raising a blush on the cheek of innocence; I say the man who could commit to paper such

a story merely with a view to reconcile those immodest shows to the Israelites, and which appear to have been luxuries of this man of God, would not hesitate to debauch—nay ravish the Midianites.

Arrived at the 19th chapter of Exodus, we again behold the same deceptive conjurations of the dexterous leader of an ignorant, credulous, and fanatic people. The farce of spiritual aristocracy is here played off with great art, and impressive ingenuity. The people are kept in a state of blindness while Moses is reciprocating his visits from Mount Sinai to the plains—and from the plains back to the mount—under the pretence of bearing important messages from Jehovah to the chosen band. These delusive movements, combined with terrific manifestations, were intended as preparatory steps to the promulgation of the decalogue, or ten commandments, on which so much praise has been bestowed; but as to the true character of which it is my intention, to comment with that freedom which becomes every one whose object is the promulgation of correct principles.

Every reflecting person must have observed, that all miraculous systems of religions, are filled with hypocrisy and deception. This is particularly remarkable in the case before us; for no one can read with attention this chapter of Exodus, without being fully convinced, that Moses and Aaron, with their little spiritual band of pretended demi-gods, were imposing on the people, under color of holding secret communication with the most high on mount Sinai. Verse 21. "And the lord said unto Moses, go down, charge the people lest they break through unto the lord to gaze, and many of them perish." Here the true character of the priests is manifest. They were terribly apprehensive that the people should break through and gaze! Gaze at what? Gaze at the tricks and deceptions of Moses and Aaron, and thus discover that they had been the dupes of their more artful and designing leaders. These men were cunning enough to know that their own power and safety depended on keeping the people in ignorance. If they had permitted them to enter the *sanctum sanctorum* of the holy of holies, and had found nothing there but proofs of the deceptions and hypocrisy of jugglers, they would have been disgusted with the sight, and sought vengeance on the heads of the deceivers.

Such, however, has been the character of priestcraft in all ages and countries. These holy men are always afraid that the people will break through and gaze—that is break through that veil of mystery which they have piously spread over the sun of truth, to conceal it from vulgar eyes lest it should destroy vision. Good souls! how much mankind are indebted to you for your kind care of their intellectual optics! Were it not for this sacerdotal circumspection, rash, and thoughtless man would have broken through the sacred veils of religious mystery—would have discovered the glories of the most high—the enchanting dexterities of the priesthood—and must have utterly perished. How much then, do we owe to the pious and spiritual care of these holy fathers! They will, doubtless, as long as they are *well paid*, but no longer, go on to perpetuate their mysterious dogmas—to blind the eyes of the people; and to render unassailable their clerical usurpations. But let them remember that they must one day answer at the bar of reason for their crimes and

impositions—for the miseries they have brought, and are now bringing, on the human race. 167

MISCELLANEOUS.

The Vhemie court.—Is it credible, exclaims Voltaire, that there formerly existed a Christian tribunal more horrible than the Inquisition, and that this tribunal was erected by Charlemagne? It was the judgment of Westphalia, otherwise called the vhemie court. The severity, or rather cruelty of this court, went so far as to punish with death every Saxon who broke his fast (that is to abstain from meat) during lent. The same law was also established in French-Compte, in the beginning of the 17th century.

In the archives of a little place called St. Claude, situated in a remote corner of the most mountainous part of the county of Burgundy, are preserved the particulars of the sentence of a poor gentleman, named Claude Guillon, who was beheaded on the 28th July, 1629. Being reduced to the utmost poverty, and urged by the most intolerable hunger, he eat on a fish day, a morsel of horse-flesh, which had died in a neighboring field. For this crime, he was found guilty of sacrilege. Had he been a rich man, and had spent two hundred crowns in a supper of fish, (a common thing with rich Roman catholics) suffering the poor to die of hunger, he would have been considered a person fulfilling every duty. The following is a copy of his sentence :

“Having seen all the papers, and heard the opinions of the doctors learned in the law, we declare the said Claude Guillon to be truly attainted and convicted of having taken away part of the flesh of a horse killed in the meadow of that town; of having caused the said flesh to be dressed, and of eating the same on Saturday the 31st March, &c.”

What infamous doctors, continues Voltaire, must these have been, who gave their opinions on the occasion. Was it among Tepinambous, or among the Hottentots, that these things happened? The vhemie court was yet more horrible. Delegates from this court were secretly spread over all Germany, taking informations unknown to the accused, who were condemned without being heard, and frequently in want of an executioner, the youngest judge performed the office himself. It was requisite, in order to be safe from the assassination of this court, to procure letters of exemption from the emperor, and even these were sometimes ineffectual. This chamber of assassins was not entirely abolished till the reign of Maximilian the First. It ought to have been dissolved in the blood of its members. The Venetian council of ten, was in comparison of this a court of mercy.

Holy house of Loretto.—A few years ago, it was seriously asserted by crafty monks, and implicitly believed by all orthodox Roman catholics, that the holy house of Loretto was the very same in which the virgin used to lie with Joseph in Nazareth, and that about the end of the 13th century, it had been transported by angels from Judea to Dalmatia, and from thence across the Atlantic to Italy. The well-fed pensioners of the holy virgin showed to strangers the hearth where she used to dress her vic-

tuals, the earthen dishes she and her infant made use of, and the gown wore by the image during its migration from Palestine to Italy, which is made of red camblet. They pointed out the window by which the angel Gabriel entered at the annunciation, and as far as mortals are able to judge of the size of angels, the aperture seemed large enough for an arch angel to pass through. The idol representing the virgin Mary, with the infant on her arm, is about three feet ten inches high, and as the monks assert, was made of cedar by St. Luke, the evangelist, who, the scripture says, was a physician whilst in this, and if the assertion of the priests be true, must have turned sculptor in the other world.

To see the migrating house, and beg favors of the wooden lady, no less than from fifteen to twenty thousand enthusiasts, arrived annually from Poland, Hungary, Germany, Spain, &c., neglecting for about four or six months, all their family concerns, and becoming a burthen to the people through whose country they travelled, as most of these bigots made vows to live on the charity of others, during their pilgrimages. The number of Italians resorting every year to Loretto exceeded fifty thousand; and the whimsical incidents, which commonly took place among those motley bands of hypocrites and enthusiasts, were of such a nature, as gave sufficient cause to the tender husband and honest father to dislike the frequent vows of their wives and daughters to pay a visit to the blessed virgin of Loretto.

Craft—which signifies fraud, cunning and to *play tricks*, remains still in use and full force among nations. As applied to witches, it is called *witchcraft*, and prevails principally among the low Dutch in the interior parts of this country; it is fostered by designing mortals, and feeds on ignorance and credulity. Formerly it had been in great vogue among the Jews, as we read in *sacred history*: the witch of Endor, by her craft, brought Samuel to life, and proved that old women have *charms*, that even the youngest and fairest can never excel. But notwithstanding the high and ancient authority that this story rests on, we scarcely find any enlightened men among Jews or Christians, that give any credit to witchcraft: experience has taught them to believe that there is nothing more in it than tricks and fraud; so, thus far the Hebrew legends seem to have lost their credit with posterity. Yet witchcraft has had its martyrs, and many an old man and woman have expiated their crimes at the Christian stake, a clear proof that the orthodox do not believe a syllable of the matter, though, as we observed before, it has the word of God to sanction it.

Next to witchcraft, comes *priestcraft*, which literally, means the fraud, cunning, and tricks of priests. This sort of craft seems to be much on the decline, and to experience the same fate with that of witchcraft. Many nations have already opened their eyes to the numerous frauds committed under this title, and laugh at the priests and their craft, as we do at the old women. Yet the priests have not been put altogether out of countenance; they still endeavor to keep up the farce and wish to persuade the world that there is *something in it*. However, as knowledge and information spread, priestcraft will be buried in oblivion along with

witchcraft, and the men of God will have no more power than the witch of Endor.

Kingcraft, is another species practised by crowned heads and tyrants, and though it does not own witchcraft, it allies itself very firmly with priestcraft; they have been long in partnership, and under the firm of church and state, have greatly succeeded in monopolizing the good things of this world. They resemble a coalition of highwaymen and gypsies, who combine force with fraud, and live well at the expense of their weak or credulous neighbors. In proportion as their partnership is weakened or dissolved, the power is reduced, and the spell broken. The American revolution gave a great shock to this association of kingcraft and priestcraft, and we find, in consequence, that neither has been able to recover itself in the U. States; indeed, the priests have labored hard of late to regain their credit and authority, but to no purpose; for their *craft* is now clearly exposed.

A CATECHISM OF REASON.

Question. What constitutes happiness?

Answer. The preservation of our bodies in health, and our minds in peace.

Q. How is the first of these two objects to be attained?

A. An eminent physician has said, "by keeping the head cool, the feet warm and the bowels open;" and I would add, by avoiding all excesses; whether of eating, drinking, exposure, nursing, action, or inaction.

Q. And how the second?

A. By avoiding all offences.

Q. What constitutes the executive of a republican government?

A. The president and hangman.

Q. Why are our public servants, who are hired to do our will and pleasure, styled "our rulers?"

A. Because the priests found this a convenient term to use in their mummeries, as tending to debase the people, and exalt themselves; and we have a long time submitted to it: thus, our own blind superstition rivets the chains which their knavery forges.

Q. What is the best mean of breaking those chains, and of thus ridding ourselves of the degrading bondage and undue influence of priestcraft, which rages to such an alarming extent in this country as to render it a vain boast that this is "the land of liberty and independence;" while the traffic in our own species is permitted, and the cant, mystery, rant and flummery of priestcraft are so devoutly idolized, so greedily swallowed; and while those same chains, which are silvered over with a mystical gloss, and hid within the burnish of a false glare, sit so lightly on our necks as to be worn without a gall?

A. By improved systems of education; seeing that

"Tis education forms the common mind;
Just as the twig is bent, the tree's inclin'd:"

and by attaching more importance to the just exercise and proper use of that certain independent monitor with us, properly termed Reason; but which the juggling of priests, combined with the rascality of kings, has so industriously and cunningly laboured to stigmatize with the degrading

epithets of "carnal reason," "pernicious reason," "God-dishonoring reason," &c. &c. And yet I would invite them to inform us who implanted that faculty within us, what it was given for, and how we are to be debarred (at this comparatively enlightened period,) from the just, free and proper exercise of it and every other property of the mind, with which we are endued, except by the undue influence of priestcraft, co-operating with the remains of our popular superstitions, the legitimate fruit of our ghostly educations.

Funeral oration of the Parsis, a people of Cambaya, in the empire of the Mogul.—O earth! O, common mother of human beings, take back what to thee appertains of the body of this hero; let the aqueous particles that flowed in his veins exale into the air, and falling in rain on the mountains, replenish the streams, fertilize the plains, and roll back to the abyss of the ocean whence they proceeded! Let the fire contained in his body rejoin the heavenly orb, the source of light and heat! Let the air confined in his members burst its prison, and be dispersed by the winds in the mundane space!

And lastly, thou, O breath of life, if perchance thou art of a nature separate from all others, return to the unknown being that produced thee! or if thou art only a mixture of material elements, mayst thou, after being dispersed in the universe, again assemble thy scattered particles to form another citizen as virtuous as this has been.

St. Giles.—This saint is in the church of England calender. He was born at Athens, and came into France in 715, having first disposed of his patrimony to charitable uses. After living two years with Cæsarius, bishop of Arles, he commenced hermit, and so continued till he was made abbot of an abbey at Nismes, which the king built for his sake. He died in 750.

St. Giles is the *patron of beggars*. Going to church in his youth, he gave his coat to a sick beggar who asked alms of him, the mendicant was clothed, and the garment miraculously cured his disorder. He was also the *patron of cripples*. After he had retired to a cave in a solitary desert, the French king was hunting near his thicket, and Giles was wounded by an arrow from a huntsman's bow while at prayers; whereupon being found unmoved from his position, the king fell at his feet, craved his pardon, and gave orders for the cure of his wound, but this the saint would not permit, because he desired to suffer pain and increase his merits thereby, and so he remained a cripple, and received reverence from the king whom he counselled to build a monastery; and the king did so, and Giles became abbot thereof, "and led the life of an angel incarnate," and converted the king. It is related of him that he raised the dead son of a prince to life, and made a lame man walk. It is farther told, that at Rome he cast two doors of cypress into the Tiber, and recommended them to heavenly guidance, and on his return to France found them at the gates of his monastery, and set them up as the doors of his own church. These are some only of the marvels gravely told of him, "many wytnisse (says the Golden Legend) that they herde the company or aungelles berynge the soule of hym into heven."

A long table.—A gentleman, writing the History of the Table, has made a curious calculation. Solomon the wise gave a feast in the courtyard of the Temple, at which were consumed 22,000 oxen, and 120,000 sheep. This feast, then, would require sixty acres of land for kitchens, 17,000 cooks, and allowing one pound of meat to each guest, and eighteen inches to each seat, the table would extend the whole length of Solomon's kingdom, viz. from Dan to Beersheba, or from Whitechapel church to Bristol cross.

Philosophy teaches us to seek in nature and the knowledge of her laws for the cause of every event; when this knowledge shall become universal, man will relinquish with elevated satisfaction his attachment to supernatural and vindictive theology. It is this theology which has destroyed the harmony of nature and demoralized the intelligent world.

Free Press Association.—The meetings of the Association are now held in the Bowery Long Room, opposite the Theatre; where a lecture will be delivered to-morrow (Sunday) afternoon, at 3 o'clock, *on the attempts of the priesthood to form a union of church and state*—By Mr. Houston.

In the evening, at half-past 6 o'clock, the following question will be debated:—*Did ever such a person as Jesus Christ exist?*

Tickets of admission to the debate, (to be had at the door) three cents each. Ladies free.

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